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A UNIFORM PROCESS AND FORMS FOR THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF THE DIRECTOR, PROFESSIONAL STAFF, AND SUPPORT STAFF OF THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

by Ed C. Apodoca

In the past decade the student financial assistance programs have mushroomed tremendously, not only in volume, but in complexity. The need for competent student aid administrators and support staff has never been more crucial. Continuous changes and the increased accountability in financial aid programs require financial aid offices to seek the best qualified employees, organize training programs, and develop processes for measuring performance. Over the years, the responsibilities and expectations placed on the financial aid office employees have increased to meet the demands of the new programs. However, most campuses have not had the opportunity to develop fully a comprehensive performance review program.

The report presents a sample of an annual performance review (APR) process. The intent is to utilize the same form for the evaluation of the director, professional staff and support staff. Individualized performance review is accomplished identifying and evaluating within the common form specific duties and responsibilities. The review process encourages active participation by the individual being reviewed and the immediate supervisor. The department head is offered the opportunity to be a part of the process and to play an active role if necessary.

The key factor in the APR, as is true in most performance evaluations, is to identify and agree on the duties and responsibilities being reviewed. Consequently, a job description form is included as an integral part of the APR. This will help to document the expectations and functions being evaluated. Current up-to-date job descriptions are important to any management concept and should be reviewed annually.

PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

The purpose of any evaluation system is to measure and document the performance of the employees. The ability of an office to provide the necessary services to students depends heavily on the efforts of the staff. The proper identification of duties and the evaluation of performances significantly contributes to the efficiency of the office. The effective development of an office relies

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heavily not only on long term planning and sound decisions, but also on the early identification of problems, misunderstandings and inadequate performances. A complete performance evaluation program fits well with most long term planning, especially if it includes accurate up-to-date job descriptions, periodic job reviews, and a strong communication system which allows the sharing of concerns.

Evaluation of performances has proven useful for identifying problems and for documenting timetables and agreements on how they are to be resolved. Well-developed performance evaluation forms can serve this purpose and are effective for documenting expectations and monitoring progress. However, the form should direct its main objective "to tell the employee where he/she stands" and should not attempt to achieve a multiplicity of purposes. A rating instrument becomes cumbersome and ineffective when it tries to serve a wide variety of objectives, and usually fails to meet them. It should be used as a channel of communication between the staff and the supervisors, acknowledging not only the problems, but the successes.

THE DESIGNING OF A PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FORM

The design and appearance of a performance evaluation form is extremely important. The following items have proven, over the years, to be more beneficial than others in making evaluation forms effective: 1) Forms should be, as much as possible, self-contained without requiring extensive explanations or instructions; 2) the purpose and/or expectations of the forms should be identified; 3) a definition of key terms or standards of reference should be made; and 4) the items to be reviewed should reflect those in the job description and areas of responsibility. In order to assist in identifying the areas being evaluated, a description of responsibilities or an up-to-date job description should be included.

Since the length and appearance of the form can be intimidating, it is critical that time and effort be spent in designing the most effective form possible. It must be comprehensive enough to meet the full intent yet avoid duplication of effort or the need for additional forms or steps. A performance evaluation process functions better when it is incorporated into the operational structure of the department. It should not be viewed as being self-operating or an outside function. It requires the commitment of the office, its supervisors, and employees. The development of an effective rating system is a continuing process which improves as it is used and is modified to meet the needs of the office. Active utilization of the form with periodic critical reviews is the best way for detecting its weaknesses and for improving its effectiveness.

Employees should be encouraged to understand the evaluation process, to participate actively, and to be aware of the effect it will have on them. If the performance evaluation system is to be successful, all affected members — director, supervisors, and staff — must be involved and committed to it. Past experiences have clearly shown that a successful evaluation process is an essential part of an operation. However, it should be viewed only as an instrument for identifying and documenting the performance of staff, and not as the solution to management problems. An effective evaluation process exposes poor supervi-

sion, low employee morale, need for additional training, organizational weaknesses; plus identifies the strengths and positive points of the office.

A year seems to be the customary time interval for performance reviews, but there are some definite dangers if such a schedule is not flexible. Prompt feedback is extremely important in correcting problems and should not be delayed. The annual performance review is excellent for a thorough evaluation of performance and for allowing a systematic approach to the process. However, periodic feedback should occur as needed. Under such a system, the annual review becomes a cumulative summary of the specific results previously discussed. This eliminates surprise in the annual review.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION/MERIT INCREASES

Most institutions attempt to separate any correlation between merit increases and performance evaluations. This should be a campus option; however, on those campuses where the performance evaluation process is used for determining the merit increase, it is important that the employee be made aware of that fact.

A performance review which determines the merit increase limits the effectiveness of the process since constructive criticism or recommendation for improvement may become threatening to employees and result in confrontations. This prevents honest discussion and sharing of concerns between the supervisor and employee. Since many of the financial aid offices do not have direct control over merit increases, due to funding constraints or union contracts, the performance evaluation forms can be used solely as a means of communicating with employees concerning their performances and future goals. The design of the evaluation form should reflect the intent and expectations of the position so that the results can be fairly and clearly documented.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Certain qualities are considered important to the performance of specific responsibilities. The attitude of an employee, as well as the quality of work, are examples of two factors normally viewed as important in judging the level of performance. However, in evaluating the total effectiveness of any employee, numerous other items should be included: initiative, accuracy, effective utilization of time, ability to work with others, and dependability are just a few.

The areas being evaluated should be in agreement with current job classifications and descriptions so that both the staff and the supervisors have a common base for discussion. Obviously, somewhere between developing the concept of the process and its implementation, an understanding must be reached. The process should be fair, open, and reasonable in judging the performance of an individual. The intent of measuring performance against job obligations should be a goal. It can prove to be extremely difficult and frustrating when not properly handled.

The development of a performance evaluation process for professional staff is difficult to structure and may require a more subjective approach. Many of the responsibilities performed by professionals cannot always be rated in the same way as those of the clerical staff. The effectiveness of a professional must be judged by taking into account factors which may not be quantitative. If the

evaluation is to be on a subjective basis, then criteria or expectations should be identified. The following is a list of factors which are used by many evaluation processes:

FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE

Quality of Work —

Does the employee's work meet established quality standards? Does the work meet the audit requirements?

Quantity of Work —

Quantity of work accomplished in a given period of time.

Job Knowledge —

How well does the employee know the job? Is he/she knowledgeable of federal, state, and institutional guidelines? Is the employee aware of the various programs available?

Reliability —

Consider reliability and dependability; degree to which employee can be trusted to do the work without constant supervision.

Cooperation —

How well does the employee cooperate and get along with co-workers, supervisors, department head, etc.?

Ability to Follow Instructions —

Demonstrated ability to learn new methods and follow instructions for satisfactory performance on job.

Responsibility —

Exercises care to comply with current guidelines while insuring fair and equitable treatment to all students. Accepts responsibility well?

Punctuality and Attendance —

Is employee punctual? Is attendance a problem? Does he/she meet deadlines or timetables?

Future Growth —

Does the employee have ambitions and qualifications for advancement to jobs of higher responsibility?

Effort —

Consider energy expended and application to job day in and day out.

Supervisory Responsibility —

To what degree has he/she organized the work and delegated authority and responsibility?

Job Responsibility —

Indicate the quality and quantity of work turned out by the work unit.

Application of Experience —

Indicate ability to profit by experience; to learn; to analyze and grasp new information. Does he/she attend training programs, association meetings and/or participate in learning sessions?

Skill and Accuracy —

Does this employee produce correct work?

Knowledge —

Command of knowledge essential to the job. Knowledge of federal, state, and institutional policies and procedures. Knowledge of programs.

Effort —

Extent of employee's industry and persistence in handling work problems and in directing effort of others.

Cooperation —

Consider cooperation with other departments; knowledge and appreciation of the program of other units.

Selection and Development of Subordinates —

Consider success in selecting, developing through planned training, and improving subordinates by imparting information and arousing interest and ambition.

Initiative and Ingenuity —

Consider original contributions made to improve methods and to add to existing knowledge.

Dependability —

Thoroughness and dependability of results.

**PERFORMANCE EVALUATION
RECOMMENDED STEPS TO BE TAKEN**

One or two weeks before:

Supervisor and employee should discuss the upcoming appraisal interview; supervisor clarifies the purpose of the interview, answering any questions. A time should be set for the actual interview.

Supervisor provides to the employee:

- Performance Evaluation form with the job responsibilities briefly outlined and a copy of the current job description;
- Opportunity for employee to update information if necessary.

Supervisor should recommend that the employee review the entire Performance Evaluation form and prepare comments and ideas that it prompts.

Supervisor further prepares for the interview by:

- a. Consulting with others for whom the employee performs work;
- b. Formulating performance evaluation conclusions;
- c. Securing concurrence of next level of supervision.

During the interview:

Supervisor and employee agree to and make any changes needed in the responsibilities portion of the performance evaluation form. (Significant changes should result in a new job card for submission to personnel for review).

Based on the discussion, the supervisor records the performance ratings and relevant comments.

Agreement is reached on future steps and written on the form including dates for completion and timing for next interview.

Following the interview:

Supervisor and employee sign the form, employee adds comments, if desired. The department head's signature, or his/her authorized designate for the purpose of performance evaluation, is then secured. A copy is provided to the employee, and the original is placed in the departmental file. A copy is provided to the staff personnel office whenever policy prescribes such.

FINANCIAL AID OFFICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Introduction

The annual performance review (APR) is designed to provide an opportunity for the employee to describe formally and comment on his/her growth and development over the previous year. It also allows the immediate supervisor to comment on job performance and to make recommendations concerning future expectations.

Job Description Form

A job description form is included and should be used to identify specific functions required and should be consistent with those included in the APR. Specifically identified responsibilities are much easier to evaluate and to comment on.

Depending on the size of the office, there can be numerous staff members involved in the APR: the staff member being evaluated, the staff member's immediate supervisor, the appropriate intermediate authority, and the department head (if the department head is neither the immediate supervisor nor the intermediate authority).

Definitions

Staff Member — the employee whose job performance is being evaluated.

Immediate Supervisor — the individual who directly supervises the staff member.

Intermediate Authority — the individual who directs the work of the immediate supervisor.

Instructions for Completing APR Form (See Appendix B)

Section I — *Responsibility of the Department Head.* Data required for this section is usually available in the employee's personnel file.

Section II — *Responsibility of the Immediate Supervisor.* The formal job description approved by the personnel office should be attached to the form. If changes in the duties performed by the staff member have occurred and are not yet included in the job description, the changes should be noted in this section and the job description updated.

Section III — *Responsibility of the Immediate Supervisor.* The immediate supervisor should use this section to identify the specific responsibilities being evaluated. This is a key section in making a single common form flexible and effective. The duties being evaluated should reflect those in the job description and within the proper job classification of the campus.

Section IV — *Responsibility of the Staff Member.* This section may be used by the employee to list accomplishments related to the performance of duties during the past year. The staff member should begin this section with comments on activities performed in satisfying the duties listed on the job description. Specific accomplishments or improvements achieved since the previous APR should be noted. The staff member should comment on all additional duties performed, i.e., University committees served and the results achieved through that service.

Section V — *Responsibility of the Immediate Supervisor.* Before completing

this section, the immediate supervisor should have completed the "Annual Performance Evaluation Profile". This portion can then be used as a guide in completing Section V.

The immediate supervisor can use this section to appraise formally the staff member's performance. All aspects of the job should be commented on, whether favorably or unfavorably. There should be specific comment on any adverse comments made on the previous APR.

If the staff member has made any statements (in Section IV) that the immediate supervisor feels are incorrect or inaccurate, the immediate supervisor *must* offer *specific* comments in Section V.

This section may conclude with the immediate supervisor's recommendations concerning contract renewal, multi-year award, or termination.

Section VI — *Responsibility of the Intermediate Authority*. The intermediate authority may comment here, if knowledgeable, regarding the performance of the staff member. If the Intermediate Authority disagrees with any of the material contained in Sections IV and V, specific reasons should be provided.

It is possible the intermediate authority may take exception to some individual comments made by the immediate supervisor, yet agree with the overall tone of the immediate supervisor's APR and recommendations.

In any case, this section should end with the intermediate authority's agreement with or rejection of, the immediate supervisor's recommendations concerning the staff member's contract. The intermediate authority's signature alone, without specific comments, will be considered an indication of agreement with all recommendations.

Appendix A
Evaluation of
PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEW
Observer Check List

1. Was the purpose of the interview mutually understood?
2. Did the supervisor create a relaxed and private atmosphere for the interview?
3. Was the employee allowed and encouraged to comment on his/her own performance and future plans?
4. Did the employee know what standards were being used to appraise his/her performance?
5. Did the employee know where he/she stood after the interview?
6. Was the employee made aware of the strengths as well as weaknesses?
7. Does the employee know of ways to improve his/her performance?
8. Were future plans made with clear action dates for completion?
9. Did the two agree on the results of the appraisal and future plans?
10. Estimate the percent of time each participant spent in talking during the interview. Supervisor _____ Employee _____. Was this percentage breakdown about right for the purpose of the interview?
11. Did anything happen which contributed toward making the interview either more or less successful? If so, describe on the back of this sheet.